

There's no excuse for not buckling up

By 1st Lt. Dale Greer
123rd Airlift Wing Public Affairs

I knew I was headed for the wall the instant my car began its sickening slide.

The pile of slush and ice left behind by the snow plows on this March evening was just too deep for the traction I needed to regain control.

And so I began a series of four wildly disorienting spins that brought me closer to the concrete dividing wall with each gyration; closer to sudden impact at 55 mph; closer to what surely was going to be my demise.

I remember thinking, "That's it, buddy boy. It's been a nice life."

The force of the impact was tremendous. I was rocketed forward in my seat only to be stopped by my seat belt and slammed back in the other direction. Items that I had packed in my car for a temporary duty assignment -- a laser printer, a laptop computer, a clothes iron -- were flying around like so much confetti in a cyclone. My glasses flew off my face, and for a few terrifying seconds, the experience was a surrealistic blur of unfocused chaos.

Then I came to a stop, perpendicular to the flow of traffic and blocking three lanes on Interstate 70.

As I searched the floor for my glasses, I saw two beams of light closing in, and the whole sequence renewed itself.

A tractor-trailer approaching from behind was unable to avoid my stricken auto, and the rig slammed into my car at 40 mph.

By the time I finally came to rest about 200 yards

from first impact, I wasn't sure if I was still in one piece.

I crawled out through the passenger-side door and looked down on my twisted Honda as if I were having an out-of-body experience.

The truck driver came running up to see if I was OK. His words floated down to me through the velvet fog and remain the only clear aspect of those few terrifying seconds: "Man, you ought to be dead."

Indeed.

Judging from the damage to the car, I should have been a bloody smear inside the passenger compartment.

But I survived, in large part because I was wearing my seat belt.

Seat belts save an estimated 9,500 American lives every year, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And yet, some people still refuse to wear them.

The arguments range from the sublime to the stupid, but none of them withstand scrutiny.

Some people claim they don't need to wear seat belts because they're "only driving a short distance."

But the Louisville Police Department knows better. Most traffic accidents happen within three miles of home, according to Patrolman John R. Martin.

Other drivers rely on air bags to save them, thinking their protection is adequate in a crash.

But the NHTSA warns that air bags are a "supplemental restraint system" designed to be used in conjunction with seat belts. Air bags are largely ineffective without seat belts because they don't offer protection during rollovers or side- and rear-impact crashes.

Moreover, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says that unbelted passengers actually increase their risk of death because deploying air bags can cause fatal neck and spine injuries to unsecured occupants.

Perhaps the most insidious argument against seat belt use, however, is the one for personal freedom. "It's my right to drive unbelted," these civil libertarians say, "because my actions affect no one but me."

But their actions do affect others. According to NHTSA, 85 percent of all crash victims' medical costs are absorbed by society, not the individuals involved. And the medical costs for those victims are 50 percent higher than for belted drivers involved in accidents.

Employers also must foot the bill for car crashes. The NHTSA estimates that nearly \$9 billion is spent annually to care for employees who are injured in accidents, and another \$9 billion is spent on sick leave and insurance for crash victims.

Finally, the NHTSA says unbelted drivers are less likely to maintain control of their vehicles during crashes, which means other motorists are more likely to be injured or killed.

Some people might say I was lucky to have walked away from my accident with nothing more than a bruised arm. But luck had little to do with it.

I was wearing my seat belt. And because of that, I survived.

Fate might have a similar accident in store for you this week. Wear your seat belt and walk away from that accident intact -- if not for yourself and your loved ones, then for the rest of society.

The costs otherwise are simply too high.

Pacific Air Forces command chief thanks enlisted people for support

Commander's Hotline

The commander's hotline is your direct line of communication between me and the Wolf Pack. It's one of several means of helping to resolve concerns and to get my response to comments and questions. As a general rule, I ask you to contact the agency involved first, but if you are not satisfied, call the hotline at 782-5284, e-mail the 8th Fighter Wing Public Affairs office or e-mail me directly.



Col. Burt Field
8th Fighter Wing commander

Who to call

Base exchange.....	782-4520
Chapel.....	782-4300
Civil engineer squadron customer service.....	782-5318
Commissary manager.....	782-4144
Computer help desk.....	782-2666
Fitness center.....	782-4026
Housing office.....	782-4088
Inspector General.....	782-4850
IDEA office.....	782-4020
Law enforcement desk.....	782-4944
Legal assistance.....	782-4283
Military equal opportunity.....	782-4055
Military pay.....	782-5574
Military personnel flight customer service.....	782-5276
Medical patient advocate.....	782-4014

By Chief Master Sgt. Ron Crowl
Pacific Air Forces command chief master sergeant

To all PACAF enlisted

I wanted to personally thank each of you for your support in General Gamble's Order of the Sword Ceremony. It was a total success by all accounts. Everyone present was proud to have been a part of the ceremony and represented those of you who were unable to attend in a professional "PACAF" manner. I can assure you General and Mrs. Gamble were both honored and humbled by the ceremony.

Again, thanks for your outstanding support!



Photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Boquette

Staff Sgt. Danny Alvarado and Senior Airman Brian Sharman, 15th Air Base Wing honor guard members, Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, present the Pacific Air Forces Order of the Sword to Gen. Patrick K. Gamble, the 27th PACAF commander, during his Order of the Sword banquet April 6.



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The fax number is 782-7568.